The **Transforming Power** of the **Liturgy**

Source and Summit, Life and Action

Devoted participation in the liturgy transforms the Christian faithful, and, having been transformed, they become capable of transforming the world. This truth is expressed at every Mass, especially in the Prayer after Communion and the Dismissal. In the Prayer after Communion, the Church "turns to God to thank him for having shared the banquet and to ask that what was received may transform our lives" (Pope Francis, General Audience, March 21, 2018). In the Dismissal, the deacon invites the Church to live out the Prayer after Communion by going forth. That Eucharistic call to go forth manifests "the relationship between the Mass just celebrated and the mission of Christians in the world" (*Sacramentum caritatis*, no. 51).

It is important to understand more fully the relationship between liturgical celebrations and the Church's life and mission. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council aptly describes this relationship: "The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church" (no. 9). This sentence echoes Venerable Pius XII's address to the Assisi Congress: "The liturgy is the work of the whole Church. But we must add: the liturgy is not, however, *the whole Church*; it does not exhaust the scope of her activities" (*The Assisi Papers: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Pastoral Liturgy, Assisi-Rome, September 18-22, 1956*, pg. 226). In particular, Pope Pius has in mind the Church's duties of teaching, governing, and pastoral care. These activities of the Church, while related to the liturgy, extend beyond it. It would be inappropriate to confuse these distinct acts with the liturgical one or for one to absorb the other.

In what way is the liturgy related to these actions that extend beyond the liturgical sphere? Even though the liturgy does not exhaust the action of the Church, it nevertheless "is the summit (*culmen*) toward which the activity (*actio*) of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font (*fons*) from which all her power flows" (no. 10). The footnotes of this paragraph in earlier drafts of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* make clear that the language of "summit" and "font" is derived from the Church's teaching about the relationship between the sacrament of the Eucharist and the other sacraments. The Eucharist is the font from which the other sacraments flow, and the other sacraments are ordered to the Eucharist as to an end or summit. Thus, as the Eucharist is to the other sacraments, so the liturgy, with the Eucharist at its center, is to the action of the Church. The liturgy is not the entire activity of the Church, but the entire activity of the Church flows from the liturgy as from a font and is directed to the liturgy as to a summit.

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The Eucharistic "heart" of the liturgy is important to keep in mind. Documents which follow the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy refine its articulation of the liturgy as source and summit. In *Lumen gentium*, Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on

the Church: "Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which [sacrifice] is the fount (*fons*) and apex (*culmen*) of the whole Christian life (*vita*), [the faithful] offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It" (no. 11). In *Presbyterorum ordinis*, the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests: "The other sacraments, as well as with every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it. [...] In this light, the Eucharist (*Eucharistia*) shows itself as the source (*fons*) and the apex (*culmen*) of the whole work of preaching the Gospel" (no. 5). This refined articulation – citing both *Lumen gentium* and *Presbyterorum ordinis* – is taken up by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in its article on the Eucharist (no. 1324). Yet, there is no contradiction between this refined articulation and its earlier expression in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Indeed, as stated in an explanatory remark of the August 1961 draft of the Schema on the liturgy, "All liturgy is ordered around the eucharistic sacrifice and is derived from it, and the remaining life of the Church is ordered around the liturgy with the eucharistic sacrifice as its natural center and is derived from it" (Angelo Lameri, *La "Pontificia Commissio de sacra liturgia præparatoria Concilii Vaticani II": Documenti, Testi, Verbali, Bibliotecha Ephemerides Liturgicæ – Subsidia* 168, pg. 508).

The liturgy has power to transform us, not only by our participation in it, but by works inspired by faith, such as to:

- care for the sick and dying;
- cherish and cultivate vocations to Holy Orders and the consecrated life;
- go forth with the Gospel to those on the margins and peripheries of society;
- uphold the dignity of all races and ethnicities;
- care for our common home; and
- gladly receive migrants, refugees, and the poor.

We bear fruit interiorly by being transformed by God's gift of grace operating through the liturgy, which leads us to prayer and devotion. We bear fruit exteriorly by moving to action, transforming the world around us, fulfilling the good works of faith communicated in the liturgy. In this way, the liturgy is the source and summit of Christian life and action.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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